

Eli Balbach

Special Education Paraprofessional



Where did you grow up?

Bemidji, Minnesota.

What were your experiences in High School?

I glommed onto Art studies foremost throughout high school. I became involved in the design and process of various grand-scale murals at the school including a Senior Homage and a History mural. I was part of the film and broadcasting crew my junior and senior year. I also accelerated in Social Studies and English.

Where did you go to school?

Bemidji High School

Why did you become a teacher / para / other?

I have been wanting to teach since I was taught. I took a slower course to get there but am taking strides towards it. I have been a paraprofessional at AFA for what was going on 3 years, and now have taken the role as a long term sub for the time being. I love working with students and I also understand the cruciality of these defining developmental years. I accelerated in school because I had teachers who took the extra mile to educate me beyond coursework and textbook. I understand that teaching is a responsibility and requires diligent people. Beyond finding this line of work a noble career, it is rewarding to identify as an educator.

Where did you work before Augsburg Fairview Academy?

Before I worked here, I worked for a montessori elementary school. I wore all sorts of hats there. I started out as a kitchen assistant and custodian and then became a paraprofessional. Outside of working in schools I've worn many hats from the jobs I've worked as well.

Why did you choose to work at Augsburg Fairview Academy? Why a charter school and not a public school?

My friend and former roommate who used to work here first told me about this school and how much he enjoyed working here and that they were hiring. He told me about the challenges and rewards of the school, and the atmosphere of AFA where great relationships can be built within. I choose our charter over a public school because the focus of success is not just within coursework, but relates to the Whole Student philosophy, helping not only academics, but achieving wellness and fulfillment in life in all aspects.

What was your first impression of Augsburg Fairview Academy?

My first impression of AFA was of all the staff going the extra mile to build meaningful friendships with students and the students reciprocating, and that has yet to change. The non-authoritarian environment has continued over the years to provide a sense of comfort and ease; I feel that AFA is an education family over that of a school facility.

What has surprised you most about working at Augsburg Fairview Academy?

The openness and honesty, especially from the students. The candidness has kept me on my toes over the years, but it has been a breath of fresh breath air to be in an atmosphere of real people.

What do you like about Augsburg Fairview Academy?

The smaller class sizes and class layout in general, as well as the overall equity and levelness of the staff for both the students and other staff.

What don't you like about Augsburg Fairview Academy?

I would like to see more elective courses for students, including physical education, home economics, and music.

What do you wish other people knew about Augsburg Fairview Academy?

The extensive knowledge and aptitude of each teacher to their field, and the talent and ability that we are able draw out of the students here.

What would you say are some of your strongest beliefs about education?

I believe that to educate is to draw from the learner, not just to fill heads with information just to be relayed onto an exam. I believe that a student learns best in a hands-on learning environment. I also believe that we must look past the one-size-fits all education and embrace the individual learner with their specific needs and dynamic proficiencies.

What's your personal philosophy on what should be done about education?

Glorify mistakes. Embrace process. Listen always to the student voice. Move away as far outside of the Standards as possible while still promoting equitable opportunity. Provide choice and options so every spectrum of learner can prove mastery specific to their unique ability.

What would you tell someone who is thinking about enrolling at Augsburg Fairview Academy?

Of course do it. Everyone is welcome in our diverse AFA family.

What are your hobbies?

Painting and illustrating, playing music and playing and going to live music shows, hiking, biking, traveling, fishing,



If you weren't working at Augsburg Fairview Academy, what would you be doing instead, or what would your life be like?

I turned down a tattoo apprenticeship to work here. I know I would've enjoyed it immensely, but I find this career path I am on to go beyond self-fulfillment and personal achievement. Being able to help others achieve personal success while still using my abilities is something I can feel good about at the end of the day.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Although going to live music shows is one of my favorite pass times, I despise encores.

How would your students describe you?

Calm, quirky, artsy, friendly.